

12th Annual Blessed Culture Sports Festival 2016 held at UTS Barrytown

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BARRYTOWN - Alternating between hot, humid and sunny days interspersed with evenings of torrential downpours, the 12th Annual Blessed Culture Sports Festival (BCSF) was held on the grounds of the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) from August 10-14, 2016. This is the 7th year in a row the event has been held at Barrytown.

The volatile and unusually hot weather played havoc this year but neither the heat nor the rain, could put a damper on the enthusiasm for the games and events that highlight each gathering.

As is the case with every Festival, change is a constant. Whether it be in the games and activities themselves or the people who make up the planning committee. This year was no exception.

The old standbys of basketball, volleyball, soccer and Ultimate Frisbee still had the most participants and were the most widely attended and cheered, while new games such as the hugely popular “Pokemon Go” gave a nod toward the ongoing influence of social media.



Program Director, Oliver Noll, thanks staff and participants for another great year at BCSF

Expanded this year because of its popularity in 2015 was an online video game called “League of Legions,” while “Smash Tournament,” another popular online game, continued its run. One of the newer games “Escape Room,” where teams of 5 to 10 people are challenged to decipher clues that will allow them to “escape” within a one-hour time frame, made its debut.

“It’s really fun,” explained Sarah Brown, a registration volunteer from Berkeley, California. “Puzzles and clues are left around the room and you have to be very observant. There are 5 to 10 team members and you have to think strategically as a team in order to solve the riddles.”

The continuing growth of social media was very much on display. Signs to “Like Us” on Facebook, “Tweet Us” on Twitter, “Snap Us” on Snapchat and “Follow Us” on the BCSF website were on display throughout the campus.

Jin Kwon Kim, the founder of BCSF, and executive director since its inception, stated that now that he’s “approaching 40” it’s time to let the “young people” take over, signaling his move to a more advisory role.



“What I’m really doing is allowing some of the folks on staff to come up, take initiative and put their own ideas into the whole event,” said Kim. “I think that’s where the new ideas are generated and I’m really excited by that. A lot of the new stuff happening this year actually started with Oliver Noll and his team, things like promoting Snapchat and Pokemon Go.

“For me now it’s more of me trying to be in a supportive role for them, and be able to draw in more of the families with kids; people of my generation as well.

“It’s amazing to see what we created, and I really mean we,” said Kim. “It’s really a team effort here. We have been given this opportunity to be able to take the community, values, and people we have and create something we can really enjoy.”

With many of the people on the BCSF staff - whether on the organizing committee or as a volunteer - returning year-after-year, much of the work done in the preparation and the running of the Festival is by people with the experience and knowledge of what works and what doesn’t.

One of those people is Oliver Noll, who is taking on much of the organizing and planning for the Festival that previously was Kim’s area. Noll quickly pointed out, however, that this is far from a one-man operation.

“BCSF is run by a core group of people, volunteers and core staff,” said Noll, “and every single one of them could direct this workshop. It’s really a team effort of many capable people. So, it doesn’t rest on one person, it’s a group effort.”

Noll also explained the concept of trying new things to test their popularity. If people like them they stay, if not they eliminate them and move on to something else. There’s always an aura of experimentation and growth in the planning process.

“The way BCSF works,” explained Noll, “is that we try many new things and if something is popular then we ramp it up the next year, and if it continues to remain popular then we continue to invest in it.

“Smash has been going for a while, League of Legions is in its second year, and we ramped it up this year because it was so successful last year. We also added “Disc Golf” and “Escape Room” this year and we’ll take some time to evaluate them and see if we bring them back next year.”

Conversely, when an event or game doesn’t work they are eliminated. One such event eliminated from

last year was the “Battle of the Bands.” The main reason being that there weren’t enough entries. It was replaced with an “Open Mic” night.



Jin Kwon Kim speaks at the BCSF 2016 closing ceremony

“As we were setting up for the closing ceremony, I was asking anyone I saw to give us a hand, and everyone was more than happy to help put this together,” said Noll. “Everyone here is really grateful to each other for stepping up to the plate this year.”



Jin Kwon Kim spoke at the closing ceremony. “This is year number 12 of BCSF, and there are people who are here now who don’t know of a time in their lives when there was not a BCSF,” he said. “I refer to this event and this time as an oasis. I come here to get away from the world. What I would love to see is that when we collectively come together like this as a nation, we see the power that happens when this group assembles, and bring it to the world. My goal is that, when you all go home, what we experience here becomes the new normal out there. Imagine that. What you experience here as a community -- the trust, the friendships, the sportsmanship, the culture, the talent, the skills -- imagine having that with all your friends, and that all being part of what you call normal.”

One thing is sure, that when the Sports Festival returns to Barrytown next summer, we can imagine something new and exciting will return with it.